

**Chief of Naval Operations  
Admiral Gary Roughead  
Remarks as delivered at  
Centennial of Naval Aviation Kick-Off Gala  
USS Midway Museum  
February 12, 2011**

Good evening. It's great to be here. Al [VADM Allen Myers], I see the Commandant reduced you in rank. Don't worry I think you'll probably get another star. I told you with the Commandant out here, I really wanted you to transform him, when it comes to naval aviation. I didn't think he would be that bold; to change the service, but thank you for doing that. Jim [GEN James Amos] thanks so much for being part of this evening and for your leadership of our great [U.S. Marine] Corps. Being able to work with you and shaping the future and also ensuring that we remain the force that the nation can turn to anytime is a true honor for me. Thank you my friend.

It really is terrific to be here tonight, with all of you especially in this place, on this ship. A ship with a storied history unto itself, but a namesake of our Navy's finest hour, to be across the bay from where it all began in naval aviation 100 years ago.

I'd like to thank the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Foundation for all that you have done to make this possible, and of course to Vice Admiral Al Myers and his team that has really put together, not just a great event for the day, but also a series of events that will last a year, and be a fitting tribute to the men and women of naval aviation for our Sailors, to our Marines and our Coast Guardsmen and especially to the families who support them. We couldn't do what we do without you.

I think it's safe to say that today, tonight and throughout the course of this centennial year that there will be many tributes to naval aviation. They will be grand and they will be great. I believe that I had the privilege, indeed the honor, of seeing what is the greatest tribute to naval aviation about three weeks ago.

It was far from here. There were no crowds. It was naval aviation in full display. At the end of a long day, it was my privilege to be on board the USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72) in the North Arabian Sea. To be there at the end of the day for the debrief of the operations that had been conducted in the skies over Afghanistan; it was a scene that was repeated in many carriers in many conflicts. When I looked at those aviators just returning from very long missions, as many of you know firsthand, or just the sound of their magnificent machines gave confidence to our troops on the ground who are in contact with the enemy. That same noise struck fear in the hearts of that enemy. I was transported to images of the past. It was the continuity of the ready room that I saw. The haircuts and the flight suits may have been a bit different, but the commitment within each aviator, that unique make-up that drives someone to launch from the deck of a ship at sea, and fly into harms way, is the same as it has always been. It is the same as it must always be.

In addition to those pilots, it was clear to me as I sat on the mess decks of the Abraham Lincoln, and had dinner with the Sailors that made that machine work, that their pride ran just as deep. They were tired. They were a bit grimy. You could see in their eyes that they were proud of everything that they did. They knew that it was their job, it was their part, to make sure that those airplanes left were able to do their mission, and come back safely aboard. It's in that group of individuals called naval aviators, who fly where we ask them to fly, to operate where we send them, and to be flexible enough to shift from one area of operations to the next on short notice and never miss a beat. You can rest assured that those young naval aviators that I met with after they had accomplished their mission, and safely recovered aboard the ship that night, that they honor those who came before them with their competence, with their courage, and with their pride in who they are. As you so well know, goes far beyond just what flies off the decks of our carriers.

It's in our helicopter force that part of virtually every ship that goes to sea in the United States Navy that gives our Navy the reach at sea that we need. It's in our maritime patrol community, that provides that over-watch; that gives us that edge, to control the sea and a deed in that current fight that's been able to transform themselves to be able to provide that same capability in the sands of the Middle East.

The quality of our men and women in naval aviation has always been the key to our success in the skies and it will ever be so. Some may question the need for a Navy to have an Air Force. Actions speak louder than words. As I left Abraham Lincoln the next morning, I was very aware of the fact, that if I were to return to that ship, one year to the day, it would be in the North Arabian Sea. Those Sailors would be preparing those airplanes to go forward, and those pilots would be launching into the skies over Afghanistan.

So there should be no doubt that the needs exists for us to have that capability. I think that what I saw and the spirit that was embodied in that ship, in the helicopter crews that were flying in that region, and the P-3s that were providing the key capability, that there is no more fitting tribute then that to naval aviation. Indeed there is no better indication that we have within us as Navy, to innovate once again, and preserve the off-shore options that our nation will need, in what is clearly an uncertain future.

Today I am pleased that naval aviation is reinventing itself, renewing itself, with the Joint Strike Fighter, the continued production of the Super Hornet, the production of the EA-18G Growler, the production of the P-8 Poseidon, the introduction to the fleet of the MH-60R, the MH-60S helicopters, and the recent arrival in the fleet of the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye.

New aircraft in various stages of development, and deployment continue to set new standards much as we did just last week, with the first flight of the X-47 B, our first carrier unmanned aircraft.

The key for us as a service, both the Navy and the Marine Corps., is that everything that I just mentioned, you can touch with your hand. It's not some power-point concept that we're dealing with. These are machines that are coming into the Fleet.

They will soon be joined with a new class of aircraft carrier; the [USS] Gerald R. Ford. It will change how carrier aviation is performed. Those capabilities will work hand in hand with the rest of the Navy to maintain our dominance at sea. As we begin a year of tributes tonight, let us honor the legacy of all of those who have gone before. Let us keep one hand on the past and the richness of that history, but also take the other hand and reach into the future for another century of naval aviation that will be made possible by the resourcefulness, the spirit, and the courage of the young men and women who make up naval aviation.

Thank you very much.